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I graduated from the Naval Command Course (NCC) at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1965. On my return to India, I reported at Naval Headquarters New Delhi for an appointment at sea. As a matter of protocol and having undergone training abroad, I was required to call on the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) to apprise him of my assessment of the NCC course. I briefly narrated the curriculum, concluding that it was a wholesome course promoting understanding amongst the international naval community. After carefully listening, the Chief shot a straight question back at me: "Do you believe this training in the USA is of any value to the Indian Navy or a prop to your personal career?" I was taken aback a bit, but collecting my wits, I replied that such an exposure as in the NCC should help one to contribute to the interests of the Navy in the long run, and that my career was only a side issue. He gave an enigmatic smile. To date I have not been able to figure out whether the Chief thought that I believed in what I said.

It was exactly six years after the NCC experience, in 1971, that I had the privilege of commanding the only aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy, *INS Vikrant*. The tension between India and Pakistan was building up. The USA/Soviet Union cold war was at its height, with the famous U.S. tilt against India. A good deal is on record as to how the nuclear carrier task force led by *USS Enterprise* (the 'Big E') was sailed from the Far East to create a presence in the Bay of Bengal to influence the outcome of the Indo-Pakistani conflict. *INS Vikrant* Task Force, comprising the carrier and three anti-aircraft/anti-submarine frigates, was deployed in the Bay of Bengal with a directive to establish a Zone of Command to ensure that there was no outside interference from the sea with the advancing Indian Army in the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In the execution of its aim the Indian Task Force had in a short time captured about forty foreign and Pakistani ships attempting to break the blockade to reach East Pakistan ports, carrying reinforcements and supplies for the beleaguered Pakistani Army. By 12 December 1971, the fighting on land had entered the final phase in favour of the Indian Army.

*INS Vikrant* was on patrol north of Andaman Islands blocking the approaches to Chittagong when, on December 15th, late in the evening, the BBC announced the entry of the 'Big-E' task force in the Bay of Bengal. The broadcast added that the U.S. task force was to make for Chittagong to evacuate the stranded American citizens. This was a bolt from the blue. I conjured up a situation of a direct confrontation. I waited for instructions from the Naval Headquarters but none arrived. It was later at night that I decided to proceed south anyway, to intercept the 'Big-E' before she could enter the war zone. It was near midnight when the Midshipman on Watch approached me on the bridge and sought permission to ask a question. I nodded, and he said, "Sir, what would you do when you sight the Big-E?" This question was no doubt uppermost on my mind, but without any hesitation I replied, "You do not have to worry, young man. America is a friendly country, so I would wish the captain of the 'Big E' a good morning and ask him what I could do for him." The midshipman was not convinced and added, "What if the 'Big-E' opened fire against us?" I replied, "I have been educated in the Naval War College, and I understand the American psychology well. If the 'Big-E' attacks us, Abraham Lincoln would be turning in his grave."

Throughout that night *INS Vikrant* continued her sortie south, and our air recce covered an area to a depth of 500 miles. There was no sign of the U.S. task force, so in the absence of any instruction from the Naval Headquarters I turned back north to rejoin my patrol area. As the day dawned, BBC broadcast amplified its earlier report: that having entered the Bay of Bengal from the Malacca Straits, the U.S. task force had proceeded west instead of going north to Chittagong. On reflection I felt that my reactions in the warlike situation proved the value of my tenure at the NCC. As a postscript to this anecdote, soon after the victory of the Indian Armed Forces, one of the foreign celebrities that visited India was the renowned naval leader Admiral S.G. Gorshkov, Chief of the Soviet Navy. During his visit to Bombay he came onboard *INS Vikrant*. I had known the Admiral well earlier during my tenure in Moscow as the Indian Naval Attaché. The Admiral congratulated me and asked, "Were you worried about a battle against the American carrier?" He answered himself: "Well, you had no reason to be worried, as I had a Soviet nuclear submarine trailing the American task force all the way into the Indian Ocean."

I thought to myself, it is not easy to convert a cold war into a hot war. Cold war is brinkmanship and only posturing. When the chips are down, you do not play cat and mouse games but come prepared to hit hard to vanquish your adversary.